

Dahmer Trial Case Rested By Government

MERIDIAN (AP)—The government rested its case today against 11 men charged with conspiracy in the Vernon Dahmer firebomb attack and Federal District Court Judge Dan Russell declared a mistrial for one defendant.

Russell ordered the mistrial for Lawrence Byrd because Byrd's name was mentioned by a witness at one point despite court instructions against it.

Former FBI Agent William Dukes was testifying before the jury yesterday about a meeting with defendant Cecil Victor Sessum and Russell had specified there should be no mention of Byrd's name in this phase of the testimony.

However, under stiff questioning by defense attorney Lawrence Arrington of Hattiesburg about the meeting and how it was set up, Dukes used Byrd's name. Byrd's attorney, Guy Walker of Laurel, entered the motion for the mistrial, but Russell delayed his ruling until today.

Russell overruled another defense motion in which the defense sought to prevent any

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witnesses from mentioning the prior state trials or convictions of any defendants. Several have been tried for murder or arson in the case.

Russell said felony cases were a matter of record and convictions stood even if an appeal had been filed and would stand until they were reversed.

After the court ruling, the defense began presenting its case.

Much of the session yesterday was taken up by the government's efforts to get what it called a confession by Sessum before the jury. Sessum was one of 11 Ku Klux Klansmen charged in federal district court with conspiracy in the Jan. 10, 1966, firebomb attack on the Dahmer grocery and home near Hattiesburg. Dahmer had been active in trying to get Negroes registered to vote.

FBI agent J. L. Martin and Dukes interviewed Sessum on March 1-2, 1966, in the case.

MARTIN TESTIFIED the two agents met Sessum, identified as exalted cyclops of Jones County Unit No. 4 and Lawrence Byrd on Byrd's farm. The meeting was set up by Byrd, Martin said.

After Sessum declined to talk at the FBI's temporary headquarters. He said Byrd left the farm and returned to his Laurel home.

On the way to Hattiesburg, they stopped at Sessum's request at the cemetery where Dahmer is buried. There, the FBI agent said, Sessum became emotional and wept.

WHEN THEY arrived at the Hattiesburg motel where the FBI headquarters was located, the two agents interviewed Sessum.

He admitted participating in a meeting two or three weeks before the attack at which someone said that "something's got to be done about that Dahmer Negro down south."

Sessum volunteered for the project, Martin said, and was given the responsibility of assigning some of the personnel to go on the project. He admitted to participating in both a practice run on the Dahmer home

and the actual attack, Martin said.

THE TESTIMONY of Dulles, now a lawyer at Gulfport, was virtually identical to that of Martin.

Sessum testified he had not given the agent any information on the Dahmer attack.

He said he was removed from Byrd's farm at gunpoint and taken directly to Hattiesburg where he was beaten by Dukes.

"Bill Dukes hit me with his right fist and then hit me with his left fist. He struck me 20 to 25 times with his blackjack, he picked me up with his left hand and slapped me back and forth with his right," Sessum testified.

AT THIS point, U.S. Dist. Court Judge Dan Russell asked "have you ever been in a mental institution?"

"No, sir," Sessum replied, and Russell said, "Go ahead".

Sessum said the two agents took him to the cemetery after the interview and Dukes forced him to his knees at gunpoint, ordering him to pray.